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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1415
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JUN 5208
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 9750
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 2613
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 2444
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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [PE](#)
SUBJECT: AMAZON PROTESTS: UPDATE ON JUNE 5TH VIOLENCE AND
AFTERMATH

REF: A. LIMA 795
[1](#)B. LIMA 810
[1](#)C. LIMA 816
[1](#)D. LIMA 822

Classified By: Amb. P Michael McKinley for reasons 1.4b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Peru's premier political weekly, Caretas, published a series of articles that help clarify events during the June 5th clash between protesters and police in Peru's Amazon, complete with a series of pictures showing that, in one incident, police were ambushed by protesters firing at officers. Official figures now report 25 police and 9 civilians killed, with 169 civilians and 31 police injured; protesters continue to claim as many as 45 missing, but there is so far no evidence to support widespread rumors that security services have hid civilian corpses. The Human Rights Ombudsman continues to investigate as do the media. In an effort to calm tensions, Congress voted on June 10th to suspend indefinitely two legislative decrees most criticized by protesters, and the GOP redoubled its efforts to resolve the protests through dialogue. So far, the national protest planned for today has appeared small and relatively uneventful, although as we go to print police are using tear gas to prevent protesters in Lima from breaching authorized routes. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On Thursday June 11th, Peru's premier weekly news magazine Caretas published a series of articles that attempt to clarify events during the violent June 5th clash between protesters and police in Peru's Amazon. Concretely, a series of time-sequenced photos accompanying the report clearly show gunmen ambushing unprepared police in one incident, supporting the emerging official version of events (refs). But given that the incident in the photographs was not the first violent confrontation of the day, the larger question of "who shot first?" in the previous incidents cannot be answered definitely yet. A rough timeline, per the Caretas and other reports, follows:

--5:30am: 550 police mobilized to remove protesters from the Fernando Belaunde Terry highway at a location near Bagua. As police approached the protest site, a group of 52 police split off to take control of a nearby hilltop. Four thousand protesters on the top of the hill surprised and shot twelve of the police. Caretas interviewed one demonstrator who claimed protesters went on the offensive after they thought the police attacked: "We took (the police's) weapons and used them to defend ourselves. Don't forget that we are former

military." The police insist they only shot tear gas canisters in an effort to disperse the crowd before the protesters attacked. According to separate reporting, the protesters then sent word of the supposed police attack by cell phone to a local radio station that broadcast the story widely.

--9:12am: In a separate incident that Caretas said occurred on another segment of the Fernando Belaunde Terry highway, a photo shows a contingent of police approaching a group of protesters, reportedly only holding non-lethal, anti-riot equipment. A second photo timed 9:13am shows police dropping to the ground and turning their weapons to the left to aim at a crop of trees and thick brush off the highway. A third photo timed 9:14am shows police laying down firing weapons and tear gas into the brush as well as one officer lying on his side, apparently shot. These photos -- reminiscent of an ambush on police by sharpshooters in an incident Lambayeque region in January -- clearly demonstrate the kind of danger police faced from radicals that sought to provoke violence during the protests. What remains unclear is the number of police casualties, if any, from this incident, and exactly where it occurred.

--Later that morning: Vandals responded to the spreading news of violence and began burning public buildings and vehicles. In the town of Jaen, 300 protesters burned the local headquarters of President Garcia's APRA party, as well as the local tax office. In Bagua Chica, 600 protesters burned the justice building, the governor's office, and the APRA headquarters. In Bagua Grande, protesters burned two other government buildings, and attempted to storm the police

station but were prevented by police.

--2:30pm: 150 kilometers from the highway clashes, protestors who had been holding 38 police hostages since April 9th heard radio reports of a supposed massacre of indigenous leaders and became enraged, according to Caretas. The protestors then selected eighteen police who they bound and tortured for several hours. The protestors then murdered ten (Caretas says) of the police, and were allegedly planning to murder eight more but may have been prevented by the arrival of security forces. One contact told us that no one really knows yet how the remaining police were freed.

Aftermath and Latest Death Toll

13. (U) The GOP now reports 25 police and nine civilians killed, as well as 169 civilians and 31 police injured. The press reports that investigators have already proven false at least one claim that police had buried dead protesters in a ditch, and no one has yet found any of the bodies that protestors allege police dumped in the river. The Human Rights Ombudsman's office and a reputable human rights NGO told us they were unable to corroborate reports of additional civilians dead, and assumed that many of those presumed dead were probably among the injured or in hiding. Protestors continue to claim that as many as 45 civilians remain missing. Meanwhile, the government and Human Rights Ombudsman have sought to ensure that protestors have received appropriate medical care and safe passage back to their communities, in some cases providing funding for food and return travel.

Agreement in Congress and Renewed Dialogue

14. (C) In an effort to calm continued tensions, Congress voted on June 10th to suspend indefinitely two legislative decrees most criticized by protestors, and the GOP redoubled its efforts to resolve the protests through dialogue. (Note: Ref D relayed incorrect initial reports that the decrees were suspended for 90 days. End Note.) The Prime Minister's office (PCM) has created a new commission, called the National Coordinating Group for the Development of Amazon Populations, that will reportedly address many of indigenous communities, historically overlooked demands, and focus on health, education, and land titling. The commission will

include four representatives from the executive branch (determined by PCM), regional governments, and ten representatives of Amazon indigenous communities. Representatives are to be designated and begin working within the next three weeks. In addition, the Catholic Church and the Human Rights Ombudsman's office have signed on to help mediate a renewed dialogue between the PCM and Aidesep that stalled in late May.

Protest Update

15. (C) The national protest planned for today has so far appeared small and relatively uneventful. Eighteen opposition Nationalist Party congresspeople made the loudest noise by holding a hunger strike in Congress and forcing the congressional leadership to temporarily suspend the session. The protest prompted an inconclusive motion to suspend several of the opposition congresspeople. Press reported a small protest in the Amazon city Tarapoto that was supported only by a radical teachers union. In Lima, labor unions and student groups held a medium-sized protest and police used teargas to prevent protestors from breaching authorized routes. Small protests occurred in Ayacucho organized by local labor groups, and in Arequipa. Protestors in the southern city Puno threw rocks at an APRA party building and blocked two main highways. Protestors in the potential flashpoint along the highway to the jungle town Yurimaguas continue to block the main road but have periodically allowed goods to pass through.

16. (C) Comment: While events surrounding the first acts of violence on June 5th remain hazy, the large number of police casualties, lack of evidence of high protester casualties, and clear example of an ambush on police all indicate that the international media portrayal of GOP-led repression are not accurate. The real story appears to involve confusion

among protestors, lack of police precautionary measures, and an unknown number of extremists seeking to provoke violence.
MCKINLEY